



*Citation for published version:*

Goodall, J 2017, 'Learning-centred parental engagement: Freire reimagined', *Educational Review*, vol. 70, no. 5, pp. 603-621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1358697>

*DOI:*

[10.1080/00131911.2017.1358697](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1358697)

*Publication date:*

2017

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1358697)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Education Review* on 1 September 2017, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1358697>

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## **Learning-centred parental engagement: Freire reimagined**

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## **Learning-centred parental engagement: Freire reimagined**

Keywords: parental engagement, Freire, learning-centred

### **Abstract:**

This article builds on the seminal work of Paulo Freire, whose critique of the 'banking model' of education have inspired educators to look beyond mechanistic, didactic means of teaching, toward more constructivist, engaging methods. In this article, I argue that, although the teaching of children has changed as a result of work such as Freire's, school staff often revert to a 'banking model' when seeking to engage parents. This paper utilises Freire's characteristics of 'banking education' as a lens to look at relationships between schools and families. Based on this, the paper then suggests a way of moving toward a more equitable, sustainable and fruitful partnership between all those involved in schooling and learning (with the former being a formalised subset of the much larger latter).

In the UK, there is a clear distinction between the achievement of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Ofsted, 2014). Up to 80% of this difference in achievement relates to children's lives outside of school (Save the Children, 2013), time children spend particularly with their parents. Parental engagement, understood here to mean the engagement of any adult who has a caring responsibility for a child, presents one of the best means of narrowing that achievement gap (W. Fan & Williams, 2010; X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Author Other, 2011; Wilder, 2014), a gap which remains wider in the UK than in comparable countries (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Parental engagement with their children's learning can lead to improvements in attendance, behaviour and academic outcomes (O'Mara et al., 2010). See and Gorard (2013) have stated that engaging with parents is the only intervention around narrowing the gap in achievement between children from different backgrounds which had a strong enough evidence base to warrant further investment and work.

Engaging parents in their children's learning has been said to be one of the most powerful levers available for improving schools (Author, 2008); it would be better to express this as it is one of the best levers available for supporting raised achievement among students, particularly those who tend to underachieve in the current schooling system. This places the emphasis where it belongs, on the child, rather than on the school. Yet for many schools, parental engagement in children's learning (rather than with the school) remains elusive, for reasons I will discuss below. In this article, I suggest not only why this might be the case but how to overcome some of the barriers schools currently face in engaging parents. To do this, I will use the framework suggested by Paolo Freire in relation to children's learning. This article takes the situation between parents and school staff in the UK as its base. Power relationships between parent and staff will vary from culture to culture (both geographic culture founded on place and personal culture founded on background).

It is important to note that what makes these differences is parental engagement *with children's learning*, rather than parental involvement with schools. Author & Other (2013) set out different levels of involvement/engagement, showing a progression from involvement with schools, thorough involvement with schooling to engagement with learning. For example, the simple act of discussing social media or films with young people can correlate to increased engagement with reading (OECD, 2012); this would come under the heading of engagement with learning, while attending a parents' evening would be involvement with the school. In this article, I deal with parental involvement with schools, as a precursor to engagement with learning. Involvement with schools often leads to and facilitates increased engagement in the home, and authentic engagement with learning is crucial if we are to raise standards for our most vulnerable students.

The relationships between school staff and parents are a vital first step toward supporting many parents to the most effective forms of engagement with children's learning (Epstein, 2007; Author & Other, 2013; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Mac Iver, Epstein, Sheldon, & Fonseca, 2015). Making those relationships more productive and more conducive to the learning of children and young people is an important element in supporting learning in the home effectively.

### ***Developments in learning and the construction of knowledge***

The daily experience of children in schools has changed drastically over the last generations (Zyngier & Fialho, 2010). For the greatest part, teaching is now centred on the learner, rather than the teacher (although some subjects may lag behind in this move, such as the teaching of mathematics (Gainsburg, 2012; Pampaka & Williams, 2016)). We now see learning from experience (rather than being told) as a normal part of education (Boud & Miller, 1996). Using the work of theorists such as Freire and Vygotsky, teaching has moved from a transmissionist to a more connected, learner centred model (Shor & Freire, 1987; Swanson, ndg)

Knowledge is now considered something that each individual constructs for themselves (Glaserfeld, 1995; Piaget, 2013; Ultanir, 2012; Von Glasersfeld, 1989); teachers can provide frameworks, scaffolds for that learning (Berk & Winsler, 1995) but the knowledge is created by the learner, on the basis of experience. We understand that the learner plays an important role in the process of learning (Ultanir, 2012). The teacher is no longer the centre of the classroom; rather (building on the work of Dewey, Piaget and Montessori), the learner takes centre stage (Ultanir, 2012); we have come to see this as child-centred learning (Entwistle, 2012; Munro, 2011; Wilson, 1969). Our classrooms are markedly different due to this new understanding of learning. A good schooling system makes itself redundant, by producing learners who are capable of learning independently, outside and out with the classroom.

The relationship between school staff and parents, however, has not seen such a move away from transmissionist models of behaviour. While we may have the goal of supporting our students to be independent learners, we've made no such changes in respect to working with their parents. Without taking this step, efforts to improve attainment are unlikely to be as fruitful as they could be, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who are often at risk of underachievement in the current system.

These relationships are often bounded by issues of positionality (Rule, 2015) which suggest (if not dictate) how relationships should work and how each of the individuals involved perceive they should interact with the learning of the child. Many of these issues are commonly understood as "barriers" to engagement, including parental previous experience of education (Author, 2008), the time parents have available (Peters, Seeds, Goldstein, & Coleman, 2008), issues of parental self efficacy and self belief (Bandura, 1977; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007, Author, 2017), and differences in social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973, 1997; Annette Lareau, 1989, 2011; A. Lareau & Horvat, 1999), as well as practical issues such as child care and transport.

While not in any way denying either the existence or the power of these issues, this article argues that there are more fundamental, basic issues which prevent effective partnerships between parents and school staff, namely the very frameworks within which these relationships exist and which scaffold their structure.

In the discussion which follows, I will examine the relationship between school staff and parents through the lens provided by Freire. I will use his list of characteristics of the banking model of schooling to examine schools' relationships with parents, examining the concept of relationships as they exist between parents and school staff, the value placed on different forms of knowledge, thinking, action, choice and authority, through a Freirean lens. I will then move on to suggest how these concepts might be reconfigured to allow partnerships to develop between families and school staff, to the benefit of young people

### ***Freire's Banking Model of schooling***

Freire spoke of a 'banking model' of schooling, in which knowledge from the teacher could be 'deposited' into the student, a transfer of knowledge rather than an act of learning. The student is expected to acquiesce to the new knowledge, and accept it, adding it to what is already known, rather than to learn new ideas by interrogating past and present experience (Freire, 1970). The banking model of schooling assumes that knowledge is something which can be transferred from one person (the teacher) who holds it, to another (the student) who absorbs it, unchanged (Leonard & McLaren, 2002). The teacher stands in place of authority, as the font of knowledge, to which the student comes, as an empty vessel, waiting to be filled.

Freire was not the first to raise issues around the type of instruction taking place in schools (see, for example, Dewey's work, (1897, 1916; 1986)). Both Freire and Dewey were concerned, in this context, with schooling, rather than education as a whole. Schooling is a small part of education, and an even smaller part of learning overall; we may define school as a generally state sponsored (and mandated) system of providing education, within specific parameters (age, curriculum) by the use of qualified staff, for socially approved reasons (Author, 2017). Dewey and others were reacting against schooling as they experienced it and saw it.

One might argue that this banking model of learning never takes place except perhaps in clear instances of indoctrination (Merry, 2005; Snook, 1972; Tan, 2004). Whether or not this banking model actually describes the process that occurs, however, is not really the point Freire is making. Freire is critiquing the way the schooling system functions, and is set up to function, and the fundamental principles on which this system is based: the value of authority over autonomy and agency, the acquiescence of the learner to received information, and the continuation of the status quo.

Freire suggested that this sort of schooling could be summed up in ten characteristics, which are summarised in Table 1, below:

*Table 1 Freire's Banking model of education*

<b>Banking education (Freire)</b>
<b>1.</b> The teacher teaches and students are taught
<b>2.</b> The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
<b>3.</b> The teacher thinks and the students are thought about
<b>4.</b> The teacher speaks and the students listen – meekly
<b>5.</b> The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
<b>6..</b> The teacher chooses and enforces her choice and the students comply
<b>7.</b> The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
<b>8.</b> The teacher chooses the programme content and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it
<b>9.</b> The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with her own professional authority, which she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students
<b>10.</b> The teacher is the subjection of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects

(Freire 1970, 72)

### ***A banking model of parental involvement***

While we may have moved on from the stilted, formal view of schooling, we still have some way to go to bring the relationships between schools and parents to the same footing, particularly for parents who are not part of the dominant social structures (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernández, 2013; G. Crozier & Davies, 2007; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). To examine why this is the case, I will use Freire's original list outlining the concept of the banking model of education, and the relationship between students and school staff as a starting point, adapting it so that it describes the relationship between school staff and parents. Freire's original statements will retain the numbering from his list and will be listed as F1, F2, etc. The new statements will be numbered as P (for parents) 1, P2, etc.

#### ***Relationships – who has the power?***

Freire's original statement:

F1.The teacher teaches and the students are taught

Becomes, in relation to parents:

## P1. The teacher teaches and the parents are taught

The first element of the banking framework immediately leads us to a discussion of the related concepts of power, status and agency. In the scenario depicted by Freire's original statement, the teacher clearly possesses the power in the relationship. S/he stands in the place of the expert. We see this even in the language often used, "parent and practitioners", "professionals and parents" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Even the language of "parents as the first teachers" of children is problematic, as it implies that their role as teachers is handed over to "professionals" at some point (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Aside from the obvious inaccuracy, as many parents are indeed professionals in their own right, this formulation sends a very clear message, assigning higher status to the learning related work of school staff than to that of parents.

If we are concerned only with what is 'banked' or with a transfer model of schooling, the greater power accorded to school staff might be warranted: if what was required of children was merely that they regurgitate set ideas from their teachers, then parents' input might not be needed. However, this model of learning is clearly not the one we hope to see in our classrooms. Education, and within that, schooling, are about much more than the repetition of set formulae; they exist to support children's construction of knowledge (and character). That process does not stop when children leave the school room, nor do we expect it to do so, or no homework would ever be assigned.

Parents have been instrumental in their children's learning since birth. Parents may well not hold qualifications related to teaching (although of course many do) but they are also not inexperienced in supporting children's learning; they have been doing it for years by the time a child arrives in school. In undertaking what can only be called a teaching role in relation to their children, parents have clearly been in positions of power when their children were young; there is no clear reason why they should relinquish (rather than share) that power when their children arrive at school.

This conceptualisation of parenting as having a teaching component, however, presents a very different picture than the one generally encountered in schools. Rather than parents 'helping' the teacher or 'supporting' the work of the school (Author, 2007; Author, 2008), schools and staff have a share in the ongoing work of educating children, work which began long before schools became involved in children's lives.

Yet we still often find that school staff are placed in positions which essentially have them direct the relationship with parents, so that staff are tasked with informing parents how to support their children's learning (OFSTED, 2015b), rather than seeing this as a shared task to take forward with parents. This model presumes knowledge, authority and status reside with school staff.

### *Knowledge – whose is valued?*

The relationship between school staff and students seems to be founded on the second statement in the revamped framework,

## F2. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing

Which, in relation to parents and school staff, becomes:

## P2. The teacher knows everything and the parents know nothing

As it stands, this statement is too extreme even for the current, far from satisfactory state of affairs between school staff and parents. Rather, it would be better to say:

P2. The teacher knows a very great deal about the child's learning; the parents know (almost) nothing.

Again, when considered critically, this statement makes little sense; parents know a great deal about their child's learning: how s/he learned to walk, to talk, to brush their teeth, to interact with other people, to fit in with her society. Yet we see this scenario played out time and again: school reports full of jargon that is incomprehensible to parents (Pearson, 2014), discussions at parents' evenings which take place in an adversarial atmosphere, across a table, in a rushed timescale, in a place where teachers feel comfortable and a great many parents do not (Author, 2016b; Author, 2007; Author, 2008).

The knowledge that parents have about their children is rarely accessed, particularly as children grow and advance through the schooling system. Even when young people are at the secondary stage of their education, they still spend the majority of their time outside of the school grounds; it is sensible that those who interact with students in these non-school situations would have valuable information to bring to the conversation around learning, yet this is knowledge that is rarely solicited or valued.

I would not argue that parents and school staff have the same sorts of knowledge about young people; they know children in different contexts and in very different ways. This means that parental knowledge about children is different: it does not mean that it is meaningless. This knowledge is a resource, and should be used to support teaching and learning; but to perform that function, it must be accessed by all the stakeholders, not just parents.

### *Thinking – who does it?*

Freire states that:

F.3 The teacher thinks and the students are thought about

In relation to parents, this becomes:

P.3 The teacher thinks and the parents are thought about

This statement is not made to imply that parents don't think; rather it is intended to point out that often the results of their thinking are not taken into account in the schooling of their children. The research shows, for example, that programmes to support parents are likely to be more effective if parents are involved in the planning, design and delivery of the programmes (Redding, Langdon, & Meyer, 2004), yet this does not appear to be common practice.

Again, we are returning to the concepts of status and value. The thoughts of parents, particularly in relation to the education and learning of their own children, have little status, therefore are accorded little value. Because parents' thoughts are accorded such low status and value, they are rarely solicited by schools; as in the previous section, available resources for supporting children are being missed simply because these people holding that resources have been relegated to a secondary, supporting role.

### *Talking – and who listens?*

Freire's comment that:

F4. The teacher talks and the students listen—meekly

Becomes, in relation to parents and school staff:

P4. The teacher talks and the parents listen—meekly

This statement is, for many teachers, very far from the truth; the number of codes of conduct for parents available from school websites is evidence enough of this. Yet I would turn here to the amount of one way traffic between schools and homes, which is often sent out with no expectation (or means) of dialogue (J. S. Author, 2016): even if parents are not meek about it, they are expected to be recipients of information rather than co-constructors of knowledge about their children.

Parents' possible contribution to the schooling of their children is ignored or downplayed. Their knowledge, their words, do not conform to those with the status of professionals, and therefore have far less impact than might otherwise be the case. Parents are, in many situations, effectively silenced. A typical parents' evening meeting, for example, may allow a conversational window of 10 minutes per family, during which the teacher must report on progress, raise any issues of concern, and answers parental questions. Even with the best will in the world, there is not enough time in such encounters to listen, in depth, to parents, much less to engage in effective dialogue about learning (J. Author, 2016b). Yet often, schools report their engagement with parents as a percentage of families represented at parents' evenings; to return this to a discussion of student learning, this would be about equivalent to reporting only attendance statistics in place of any other academic indicators. It may be a good place to start, but it's a very poor place to stop.

*Action - who acts and who is acted upon?*

Freire states:

F7. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher

Which, in relation to parents, becomes:

P6. The teacher acts and the parents have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.

This statement takes us to the heart of the issue of co-construction of knowledge; in essence, it suggests a form of sleight of hand (intentional or not) on the part of the system, so that parents *feel* they are having an influence on their children's learning, when in fact they are not doing so.

As we have discussed elsewhere (Author & Montgomery, 2013) what is often seen as parental engagement is in relation to parental involvement in schooling, rather than in learning. Examples of such activity would be inviting parents into school to read with children: a worthwhile activity but one which seem to have little effect on achievement (Author & Other, 2011). This is almost certainly because, as the literature makes clear, those parents who are willing and able to come into school to read with children are already engaged in learning in the home – the action of coming into school to read does not affect achievement because these parents are already doing what needs to be done to support learning in the home. The same could be said of any activity which involves parents but does not act to support learning in the home. For example, a parents' evening which merely reports on progress, but does not give parents ideas about how to support learning, or which does not give parents any space for dialogue with teachers around learning, would fall into this category. Parents are recipients of information, on the receiving end of a "one way monologue" (Leonard & McLaren, 2002, 29) a phrase which has also been used to characterise banking models of education.



At times, parents are also asked to give information, as the new Ofsted framework makes clear. However, it could be argued that even here we've taken a significant step backwards, relegating parents to information givers and receivers, rather than as active participants and partners in their children's processes of learning (Author, 2015).

Although it could be argued that receiving information (the most common role for parents in schooling) is an action of sorts, and that giving information is more of an action, both of these remain at one remove from the main event, which is the child's learning process. Parents' input into this process seemingly needs to go through the intermediary of a member of school staff who then decides (a use of power) how and if that information will be used.

### *Choice – who chooses?*

Some of the structures around the banking model of education are not immediately applicable to relationship between parents and schools, so we will move past both number five, which deals with discipline, and number 10, which deals with the subject of the learning process; we move here to Freire's numbers 6 and 8:

F6. The teacher chooses and enforces her choice, and the students comply

Becomes:

P5. The teacher chooses and enforces her choice and the parents comply

This is aligned to Freire's point about content:

F8. The teacher chooses the programme content and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it

Which can be adapted in relation to parents to say:

P7. The teacher chooses the programme content and the parents (who are not consulted) adapt to it

It is imperative that schools come to know their parental cohorts, their needs and desires, if schools are to work closely with parents in partnership (Author & Other, 2011). This is yet another situation in which the skills and knowledge used in teaching – authentic teaching, which we take here to mean facilitating learning rather than imparting knowledge – often fails to be transferred to work with parents.

I don't mean to argue that school staff should come to know other family members as well as they know enrolled pupils. However, I do mean to argue, based on a sound research base, that any interventions to support parental engagement with children's learning must accord with the values and ideas of the parent groups(s) in question (Author & Other, 2011) which can only be possible if those views and values are known and respected by members of school staff.

This is no more to argue that all interactions with parents should be dictated by parents than it is to argue that students should set the entire curriculum. However, it is to argue that learning in schools is far more effective when suited to the level, knowledge and background of pupils (e.g. differentiated learning, which may be described as offering students a number of options to assimilate information (Tomlinson, 2001) and that interventions to support parents require the same level of thought and attention to the audience.

### *Authority – whose is valued, whose is recognised?*

Freire characterised authority in banking education as:

F9. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.

In relation to parents, we may see it this way:

P8. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with her own professional authority, which she sets in opposition to the freedom of the parents.

I have mentioned above the issues of language between teachers and parents, which obviously obtains here, as well. But there is another issue here, that of attitudes. There is no denying, nor would I wish to deny the professional status and professionalism of the school based teaching force in the UK. I would, however, give a limitation to this: as a group school staff are professionals in relation to schooling, and the learning that goes on in schools, rather than learning overall. Parents and teachers participate differently in children's learning, but teachers may claim professional status only over that which occurs in (or is directly related to) schools. As noted above, parents have been facilitating their children's learning for a much longer time.

Teachers, then, have an authority and professional writ which runs throughout the school, but not in the area which makes the greatest difference in narrowing the achievement gap (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj, & Taggart, 2008). The two should not be confused.

We are now able to bring together Freire's framework, as applied to parents, in Table 2:

*Table 2 Banking model of parental engagement*

<b>Banking education (Freire)</b>	<b>Banking Parental Engagement</b>
<b>1.</b> The teacher teaches and students are taught	<b>1.</b> The teacher teaches and the parents are taught
<b>2.</b> The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing	<b>2.</b> The teacher knows a very great deal about the child's learning and the parents know (almost) nothing
<b>3.</b> The teacher thinks and the students are thought about	<b>3.</b> The teacher thinks and the parents are thought about
<b>4.</b> The teacher speaks and the students listen – meekly	<b>4.</b> The teacher speaks and the parents listen – meekly
<b>5.</b> The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined	
<b>6.</b> The teacher chooses and enforces her choice and the students comply	<b>5.</b> The teacher chooses and enforces her choice and the parents comply
<b>7.</b> The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher	<b>6.</b> The teacher acts and the parents have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
<b>8.</b> The teacher chooses the programme content and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it	<b>7.</b> The teacher chooses the programme content and the parents (who are not consulted) adapt to it

<p><b>9.</b> The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with her own professional authority, which she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students</p>	<p><b>9.</b> The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with her own professional authority, which she sets in opposition to the freedom of the parents</p>
<p><b>10.</b> The teacher is the subjection of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects</p>	

### ***Freire Re-imagined: Schools engaging parents***

I have painted a fairly bleak picture here of the way schools work with parents around children's learning. I would be very happy to be proved wrong, and to be shown that schools are, on the whole, approaching parents as equal partners, that parents are treated with the respect and accorded the status of colleagues in the endeavour of learning, in a true partnership around the child's learning. This view of relationships as being horizontal, rather than hierarchical, is an essential part of what might be considered the radical educational project (Edwards & Canaan, 2015), as well as the progressive one, advocated by Dewey (Holt, 1994), and which has become part of much of the workings within schools, such as the emphasis on distributed and collaborative leadership.

My own work with schools, and reading of the literature has led me to the conclusion that the picture painted above is bleak, but accurate, although there are some changes in evidence (J. Author, 2016a; Young, 2016). I have argued elsewhere that we need a radical change if we are to raise achievement and narrow the achievement gap (Author, 2014); we need to change the ideology which underpins it, that is, we need to change the assumptions and the things which we take for granted (Robertson & Hill, 2014). I continue that argument here, and the shift I propose is as much of a shift as was the move away from a banking model of education. As with that change, there are many who are already part way, or even a long way, down the road, just as Dewey, Montessori and others had work which predated Freire's.

As it stands, our conception of parental involvement or engagement is school-centric. It revolves around helping or supporting the school; schools tend to dictate the levels of engagement, often planning interventions for parents with little or no knowledge of what parents want or need (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Gill Crozier, 1999; Author & Other, 2011).

To some extent, this is entirely understandable; schools are accountable to the state for their outcomes, while parents are not. Schools are, moreover, the subject of a large literature around improving those outcomes (although there is, of course a corresponding and even larger literature around parenting). However, there is more here than might meet the eye. Our current model of parental involvement, which sees parents as, if not the problem in schooling, then certainly not the answer, arises from a long history of school-home relationships, fostered by the state, which are best characterised as a deficit model (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cochran, 1987; Irizarry, 2009; Valencia, 2012), meaning that schools need to supply that-which-is-missing from the home. This is a very different conceptualisation of schooling as *fulfilling a lack* in a child's life, to the conceptualisation that schooling *adds* to the learning a child undertakes outside of school (See: Sidorkin, 2011).

This current view of schooling and parental engagement as exemplified in the revamped framework changes the discourse around teaching rather profoundly: teachers are not, when this idea is taken to its logical conclusions, experts in schooling but rather in raising children, full stop. Their role is not to teach children what is in the school curriculum, but to teach them everything they need to know to function in society. This has further assumptions which are clearly rooted in a transmissionist, banking model of education: that the teachers all know what is needed to function in society, and that they are all capable of teaching all children, in the same way, and with the same outcomes.

When put this starkly, these assumptions clearly do not align with the view of schooling we now have.

We now speak of 'child centred education', recognising the need to see each child as an individual and to personalise learning as needed; as Montessori reminds us, the "life of a child is not an abstraction" (Montessori, 2013, 104). We have a school system which, in theory, is centred on the pupil; so why do we have a parental engagement apparatus that is still centred around the school and school staff, which uses structures (such as Epstein's models of involvement) which are school centric (Warren et al., 2009), and language which relegates parents to at best a supporting (rather than essential) role in their child's learning?

Freire says of the banking model of education:

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (Freire, 1970, 73)

Again, only a small change shows us the answer to the question posed above; it revolves around keeping parents passive, uncritical and at arm's length.

It is not surprising that the banking concept of parental involvement regards parents as adaptable, manageable beings. The more parents work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the learning of their children as transformers of that learning. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (Based on Freire, 1970, 73)

The result, clearly envisioned by the language and practice of parents as 'assisting' or 'helping' teachers with the work of learning, is a parental body which is accepting, uncritical and passive in the face of the authority and actions of the school in relation to their children's learning, relinquishing the role they have played to this point. This is a parental body which experiences their relationships with school staff as something done to them, rather than with them, just as children experiencing banking-model education experience teaching as done to them rather than learning done with them (Leonard & McLaren, 2002).

The question must be, of course, what is best for the child? In particular, what is best for those children who, at the moment, do not benefit from the system as much as their peers? The literature would seem to be clear (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Author & Other, 2011) that what is best for children is that their parents are actively engaged in their learning, especially that which takes place outside the school.

### ***The way forward: Learning centred parental engagement***

This situation need not, however, persist; it is as malleable as the banking model of schooling for children was. Parents can be agents who can “intervene and advocate on behalf of their children” (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, 150), just as the child centred vision of schooling sees children as agents in and for their own learning.

#### *Partnership for learning*

It is possible to reformulate (and condense) the revamped framework as presented, on the basis of what we already know about parental engagement in children’s learning. In this list, P1, P2 as above will be the original list as changed for parents; R1, R2 will designate the reimagined list.

P1. The teacher teaches and the parents are taught

Can become:

R1. School staff and parents participate in and support the learning of the child

Research has consistently shown that parental support for learning can lead to beneficial outcomes, including better attendance, more engagement with learning, better behaviour and raised attainment (W. Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012; X. Fan & Chen, 2001; Author & Other, 2011; Beng Huat See & Gorard, 2014; Beng Huat See & Gorard, 2015; Warren, 2003; Warren et al., 2009). This does not mean that parents take the place of school staff, nor that school staff take the place of parents (as in the earliest examples of the deficit understanding of families, in which children were removed from homes or teachers put into them (Baquedano-López et al., 2013)). Rather, it means that parents and school staff work together, each as appropriate, to support learning. For parents, this will centre on creating a positive attitude toward learning in the home (Baker et al., 2014; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003), showing interest in their child’s learning and providing moral support, as well as concrete instances of support for learning (helping with homework, for example) (Author, 2007). This is a partnership model of learning (W. Jeynes, 2012; W. H. Jeynes, 2011; Wilder, 2014), which includes school and schooling as one element of an overall journey, rather than as an end in itself.

#### *Equally valued knowledge*

Our previous statements that:

P2. The teacher knows a very great deal about the child’s learning; the parents know (almost) nothing, and,

P3. The teacher thinks and the parents are thought about

Can become

R2. School staff and parents value the knowledge that each brings to the partnership.

If we are to jettison the deficit model of parental engagement (and families in general) and move to a partnership model of parents and school staff working together to support learning, each side in the equation must respect the agency, knowledge and abilities of the other. This equation needs to be based on knowledge: just as school staff must come to know their parental cohorts (Author &

Other, 2011), so parents must come to know and understand the work that school staff do. The foundation of this relationship is the mutual valuing of the best interests of the child.

This is why it is important to examine the various tropes around parental engagement, and why we must think carefully about phrases such as “parents and professionals” or “practitioners” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) and “parents as the first teachers of children” (Baquedano-López et al., 2013) as these phrases immediately set up a disparity in importance between the roles of parent and school staff.

### *Dialogic partnership*

P4. The teacher talks and the parents listen—meekly

Can become

R3. School staff and parents engage in dialogue around and with the learning of the child

There is a great deal of emphasis on giving and receiving information from parents, such as in the recent English White Paper on education (Department for Education, 2016) and the information for school inspection in England (Ofsted, 2015a). Exchanging information, however, is not true dialogue (Bouffard, Roy, & Vezeau, 2005; J. S. Author, 2016; Weise, Lopez, & Caspe, 2006). For parents and school staff to both support children’s learning, there must be effective dialogue between them, dialogue which when appropriate also includes the child. Freire went so far as to say that “dialogue is a challenge to existing domination” (Shor & Freire, 1987, 14). Promoting effective, critical dialogue between parents and school staff may be a challenge in many schools, but even the process of working toward this end will support partnership working, and lead to the creation of new knowledge (Shor & Freire, 1987).

### *Acting together*

P6. The teacher acts and the parents have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher

And

P7. The teacher chooses the programme content and the parents (who are not consulted) adapt to it

Can become:

R4. School staff and parents act together in partnership to support the learning of the child and each other

Effective parental support for learning outside of school will require the dialogue mentioned above; parents must know what it is that children are learning, and how best to support that learning. This is not a one-way flow of information from school staff to parents, however; unless school staff are aware of what parents are already doing, and hoping to do with their children, staff will not be able to act most effectively in the classroom, or support parents’ actions outside of it. This awareness is often lacking, particularly when parents and school staff come from different communities (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cochran, 1987; Gill Crozier, 1999; G. Crozier & Davies, 2007; Warren et al., 2009).

Yet the exchange of information is not enough, as we have seen above. If parents and school staff are working in partnership around the learning of the child, they will be co-creating the milieu in which that learning will take place.

P8. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which s/he sets in opposition to the freedom of the parents

Can become:

R4. School staff and parents respect the legitimate authority of each other's roles and contributions to supporting learning

This is not a reprise and new application of the concept of 'separate but equal' between parents and school staff; I am not arguing that the remit for parental engagement in learning holds supreme in the home while school staff retain the ascendancy in school. Nor is it an argument about utilising the 'free labour' of parents (mainly women) to support schools as resources are withdrawn from them, (See, for example Shuffelton, 2015). I wish to deny the dichotomy so often placed between 'learning in school' and 'learning anywhere else' – it's all learning, and with the removal of that dichotomy, the case for parental engagement in learning becomes much more obvious. A great deal of what parents are already doing should be acknowledged, (as it is not, at the moment, particularly when it does not fit within the expected norms of middle class, white parenting (Gill Crozier, 1999; G. Crozier, 2001; G. Crozier & Davies, 2005). It is true that this partnership model will require more from both school staff and parents, particularly at the outset, but not, as has been pointed out, in the sense that one group takes over the functions of the other.

One of the basic ideas of the banking model of education is an absolute separation of kind between learners and teachers. We have come to the conclusion over the last few decades that good teachers continue to be learners themselves; the difference is one of degree, not of kind. And the same holds true in relation to parental engagement with children's learning. Learning is a continual process, which happens at times at school, supported by school staff, and at times elsewhere, supported by a wide range of individuals, foremost among them parents. Again, this is a difference in type of support, even in type of learning, but not a difference in kind, because all involved are acting to support the learning of the child (including, of course, the child themselves).

This paper has presented a new way of understanding what may be called, not the partnership around the child (although it is that) but the partnership around the child's learning. Again, to easily illustrate the proposed changes, the new schema is presented in Table 3:



<b>Banking education (Freire - F)</b>	<b>Banking Parental Engagement (P)</b>	<b>Parental Engagement Re-imagined (R)</b>
<b>1.</b> The teacher teaches and students are taught	<b>1.</b> The teacher teaches and the parents are taught	<b>1.</b> School staff and parents participate in supporting the learning of the child
<b>2.</b> The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing	<b>2.</b> The teacher knows a very great deal about the child's learning and the parents know (almost) nothing	<b>2.</b> School staff and parents value the knowledge that each brings to the partnership.
<b>3.</b> The teacher thinks and the students are thought about	<b>3.</b> The teacher thinks and the parents are thought about	
<b>4.</b> The teacher speaks and the students listen – meekly	<b>4.</b> The teacher speaks and the parents listen – meekly	<b>3.</b> School staff and parents engage in dialogue around and with the learning of the child
<b>5.</b> The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined		
<b>6.</b> The teacher chooses and enforces her choice and the students comply	<b>5.</b> The teacher chooses and enforces her choice and the parents comply	<b>4.</b> School staff and parents act in partnership to support the learning of the child and each other
<b>7.</b> The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher	<b>6.</b> The teacher acts and the parents have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher	
<b>8.</b> The teacher chooses the programme content and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it	<b>7.</b> The teacher chooses the programme content and the parents (who are not consulted) adapt to it	
<b>9.</b> The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with her own professional authority, which she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students	<b>8.</b> The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with her own professional authority, which she sets in opposition to the freedom of the parents	<b>5.</b> School staff and parents respect the legitimate authority of each other's roles and contributions to supporting learning
<b>10.</b> The teacher is the subjection of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects		

*Table 3 Freire Reimagined- Learning Centred Parental Engagement*

## ***Discussion and conclusion***

This article has presented an argument for moving from a transmissionist, banking, authority based model of schools' relationships with parents to a model based on a relationship between partners, each based in a different sphere of a child's life but with influences which overlap. In this scenario, partners and school staff work together to support the learning of the child. I have given no strictures about which party would undertake any given activity. As in all good relationships, negotiation and compromise, build on a foundation of trust, are key elements.

The current situation between schools and parents tends to downplay the autonomy of parents in relation to the learning of their children, while emphasizing the authority of school staff. I do not mean that parents are not free to act, but rather that their action is rarely solicited, often undervalued or indeed ignored (Gill Crozier, 1999; G. Crozier, 2001). Parents are indeed often perceived by school staff to be either incapable of acting to support their children or uninterested in doing so (Gill Crozier, 1999; G. Crozier, 2001; Author, 2017; Landeros, 2011; Valencia, 2010). As with Freire's view of the banking model of schooling, such relationships between schools and parents are highly likely to reinforce and perpetuate the status quo, including the perceived gap between parents and school staff (Author, 2007) and the all too real gap between the achievement of different groups of pupils.

Freire's original work had one overarching aim: liberation from oppression. I am not arguing here that parents are politically oppressed by the current schooling system, of necessity. However, as we have seen at the outset, the achievement gap in the UK can be mapped clearly to the socioeconomic status of families. This lead very often to a difference in social and cultural capital between parents and teachers (Author, 2017), with resulting differences in agency, (Author, 2013), familiarity with and ability to manipulate the schooling system to the benefit of children (Crozier et al., 2008). I am, however, most certainly arguing that parents and indeed school staff would benefit from being liberated from the current state of the relationships between them, which puts arbitrary limits on the interactions they have and on the learning of the child. To overcome this, we can use the re-imagined framework to move to a situation in which parents are partners in the co-construction of knowledge about their children.

I have suggested how this liberation might come about, through changes to the ways schools perceive, understand and work with their parental cohorts. Freire describes the metamorphosis of teacher and student, as the teacher become one who learns and the student becomes one who teaches, in the process whereby the teacher re-enters the learning process with each new student or group of students (Paulo Freire, 1994). We may say the same of the relationship between parents and teachers. In an ideal scenario, as depicted by the new framework presented here, school staff and parents constantly change their orientation, reposition themselves as depicted in Rule's work (Rule, 2015). The parents and school staff each become one-who-teaches and one-who-learns, in a dialogic relationship, eventually a partnership, in which knowledge about how to support the learning of the child is created.

The scenario presented above is indeed an ideal one, and will not emerge overnight, nor can it be created solely by the efforts of each the school staff or parents. What is depicted is a relationship, or better yet the dynamics of a relationship, which must be co-constructed by both parties, not once but many times, on a continuing basis. And for teachers, there will be many such relationships, as

they enter into authentic dialogue, as the *co-create* authentic dialogue with the families of different learners.

This may seem an insurmountable task, and indeed within the current system, underpinned by the current understandings of “teacher’s” and “parents’” places in relation to children’s learning, it is insurmountable. However, with the new understanding of the relationship between these actors proposed by the framework presented here, the change becomes not only possible but imperative. To end with a quotation from Freire, “One of the tasks of the progressive educator... is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be” (Paulo Freire, 1994, 3; Rule, 2015)

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